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President: Mr. Verbeke (Vice-President) ..... (Belgium)

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In the absence of Mr. Akram (Pakistan), Mr. Verbeke (Belgium), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance (*continued*) (A/60/86-E/2005/77, A/60/87-E/2005/78, A/60/89-E/2005/79 and E/2005/48)

Third panel discussion on lessons learned from the recent Indian Ocean earthquake/tsunami disaster: response challenges

1. **Ms. Wahlström** (Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs), Moderator, said it was clear from the previous panel that the recovery phase was even more complicated than the relief phase. The challenge was to manage expectations, maintain the momentum and establish appropriate and adequately funded sustainable coordination mechanisms which included all the actors involved in recovery and reconstruction efforts and which would be able to react immediately to new catastrophes. Since approaching the unknown required some reflection, the international community must consider carefully where to move fast and where it had to proceed at a slower pace.

2. **Mr. Kariyawasam** (Sri Lanka) said that in 2,500 years of recorded history, Sri Lanka had never experienced an event like the tsunami, which explained why its people had not known how to react to a disaster of that magnitude. However, the disaster had afforded an opportunity for Sri Lankans to discover their strengths and weaknesses and prepare for future such catastrophes. While the tsunami had also hit some coastal regions affected by militant activity, the overwhelming State and public response had been in favour of humanitarian and not parochial interests. All affected areas of the country had been treated equally. Despite the effective, magnificent local efforts, which had mitigated immediate needs and established a sense of local ownership in all recovery efforts, Sri Lanka did not possess capacities and strategies to sustain long-term recovery and reconstruction efforts and, in particular, to absorb and direct the considerable volume of resources received.

3. Indeed, it was clear that a sustainable recovery would need local and foreign assistance in addition to a central coordinating mechanism to work with district level administrations to channel assistance. Organizational structures had quickly been established to coordinate relief and rescue operations as well as rehabilitation and reconstruction work together with all stakeholders with a view to ensuring the proper management of resources and avoiding duplication and waste. Effective communications systems also needed to be set up between victims, regional administrations, donor agencies, authorities and other stakeholders.

4. The importance of national ownership in all efforts had been evident from the start as donors and well-wishers put forward competing ideas and projects on how to carry out the recovery effort. However, successful reconstruction required a partnership with the locality and an understanding of local conditions as well as projects that would ultimately be owned by the people in the affected areas. Accordingly, a national blueprint reflecting the will of the local population had been drawn up in consultation with the international donor community, the United Nations, civil society organizations and local administrations. The challenge both at the State and local levels was how to implement the projects and programmes it proposed. That required a sense of ownership of every project by the State and each affected locality, including in the territories where militants were active — hence the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on the establishment of a post-tsunami operational management structure for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of tsunami affected areas in the north and east of the country. Furthermore, the legitimacy, accountability and sustainability of disaster management would have to be guaranteed through legislation. Accordingly, a Disaster Management Act had been enacted in February 2005 aimed at raising national standards to existing regional and international standards.

5. Given the overwhelming international response during the disaster the Government felt bound to use the pledges in a manner that demonstrated the value of the donor community's magnanimity. It was regrettable that most developing countries did not yet have disaster management capacities and early warning mechanisms. To that end, principles for international disaster management and for international early warning systems on natural disasters should be developed to restore the confidence of local peoples as well as travellers. The international community had undertaken several initiatives to avoid man-made

disasters. It must likewise evolve common principles and measures in the form of commitments to action that would mitigate the effects of natural disasters. Capacity-building in post-disaster situations was no longer enough. Anticipatory measures to mitigate the effects of future disasters had to be implemented to create a uniform approach towards disaster management and risk reduction.

6. **Mr. Prasetyo** (Agency for Rehabilitation and Reconstruction (BRR) of Aceh and Nias, Indonesia) noted that the reconstruction effort in the wake of the tsunami, which had killed 131,900 people and displaced 572,000 others in Aceh and Nias, was a big challenge. However, a total of $6 to $8 billion had been pledged and the Government had understood from the outset the need for national ownership of recovery efforts and the allocation of resources. BRR had accordingly been set up to help match resources to needs; its role in that regard was to clarify needs, allocate resources, ensure integrity, expedite processes and set standards. The basic mission of BRR was to give people back their dignity. It would restore livelihoods and strengthen communities in Aceh and Nias by designing and implementing a coordinated, community-driven reconstruction and development programme.

7. In February 2005, a master plan using a top-down approach had been drawn up for the rebuilding of Aceh/Nias; however, BRR was currently correcting that plan using the bottom-up approach to take into account the opinions of the people, an element omitted in the original blueprint. BRR was responsible for planning, approving and coordinating all projects; ensuring that all projects were in line with required reconstruction principles and standards; facilitating projects, but not implementing them directly; ensuring a community input in all its actions; guarding against corruption in agency activities and all projects; maintaining the highest professional and ethical standards; and maintaining a light structure.

8. The lessons learned thus far included the fact that multiple methodologies, data sources and entry points of various international actors had to be coordinated, that vertical capacity-building was important for the implementation of the "listen, serve and lead" approach to planning. In the project cataloguing and approval process, coordination had to start very early and some overlap was unavoidable. Under the fund matching process, there was a need for long-term commitment from donors.

9. In order to build capacity in local government for project implementation, project management and implementation units were created at national level for joint planning with local government. No money flowed through BRR; such money was disbursed by the Ministry of Finance on the strength of a no-objection letter issued by BRR to the contractor or consultant. BRR was also building a control centre to keep track of all activities. In that regard, terminology needed to be reconciled across data sources while systems and businesses had to be integrated across technology and computer languages.

10. To date, BRR had, inter alia, approved 2,751 projects worth $2.8 billion across all sectors, issued guidelines, established an Anti-Corruption Charter and Organization Unit, established multilayer stakeholder coordination practice, including donor coordination and community coordination, and developed and implemented the networked capacity concept under which, for example, procurement was done by the United Nations Development Programme and administrative capability was outsourced. BRR was a lean and slim organization. His agency had learned, among other things, that trust was a key ingredient in working in close relationship with development agencies, in the Government's ownership of the programme and in the implementation of the community-driven approach.

11. **Mr. Dark** (Asian Development Bank) said that overall damage in Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives was estimated at $8 billion. The Asian Development Bank had established the Asian Tsunami Fund with more than $600 million from its own resources. Approved funding totalled more than $825 million, with $570 million of approved disbursals. An estimated $85 million would be disbursed by the end of 2005, and all projects would be fully disbursed within two years. A high-level coordination meeting in March, involving non-governmental organizations and the private sector, had focused on the transition from relief efforts to long-term reconstruction, and in Djakarta an expert meeting had focused on preventing corruption in the reconstruction phase. The Bank was involved in the establishment of a coordination and tracking system. In coordination with the host countries and other donors, the Bank was carrying out country-specific targeted

efforts: infrastructure and livelihood restoration in India; infrastructure, water supply, sanitation and the health sector in Indonesia; infrastructure, in particular power, in the Maldives; community development, livelihoods and roads in Sri Lanka; and technical assistance on coastal development planning in Thailand. The Bank had streamlined procedures for project implementation while putting in place financial, environmental and social safeguards.

12. Capacity had to be built to manage the large inflow of resources. Full Government ownership and the full inclusion of the private sector and non-governmental organizations were vital to reconstruction. Funds had to be allocated transparently, and beneficiaries had to be kept informed of the progress made. Finally, there was a shared intention to leave people better off than before the disaster.

13. **Mr. Pasha** (Assistant Secretary-General, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)) said that the United Nations Development Group, in particular UNDP, was focusing its efforts in three areas: coordination of the United Nations country teams in affected countries, support for national tracking systems to coordinate recovery efforts and support for local-level coordination. Resident coordinators and humanitarian coordinators supported Governments in strategic planning and recovery coordination, and UNDP staff had been deployed to assist resident coordinators in the tasks of strengthening assistance capacity and developing national recovery strategies and United Nations strategic plans. Recovery advisers worked with resident representatives to define recovery programming and implement projects. UNDP was helping Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Thailand set up a nationally owned donor assistance database (DAD) to track tsunami resources, progress and results; Indonesia's Agency for Rehabilitation and Reconstruction (BBR) might also participate in the system. Finally, UNDP supported national capacity-building agencies and had assisted BRR's capacity-building.

14. **Mr. Schaar** (Special Representative for the Tsunami Operation, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) said that the Federation, with $2 billion in funding from the public, had a five-year plan for tsunami recovery, encompassing health, psychological support, reconstruction of homes and social infrastructure and disaster-preparedness. Working groups within the Global Consortium for Tsunami-Affected Countries were addressing the enormous challenges of tsunami relief. The general goals were to establish inclusive coordination mechanisms and project tracking systems that would measure operational progress and final results, as well as to "build back better", so as to make communities more resilient than before the tsunami. The first specific challenge was to create a model of good practices for all to emulate; the World Bank, the ProVention Consortium, the International Recovery Platform and the Federation itself were all making efforts to that end. Secondly, the diverse individual initiatives had to be reconciled with overall government planning, including building standards, urban planning and coastal restoration. The third challenge was the transition from emergency shelters to newly constructed homes. Fourthly, all groups, tsunami victims and earlier displaced peoples, such as in Sri Lanka and Aceh, had to receive equal attention. In general, disaster recovery had to address risk reduction and leave the aid sector better prepared.

15. **Mr. China** (Coordinator of the Tsunami Response, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)) said that emergency rehabilitation operations, at $300 million, accounted for one quarter of the budget of FAO. The latter's comparative advantages were support for Government planning, training and policy, reconstruction coordination with financial institutions and technical assistance to Governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Livelihood recovery, although time-consuming, had to be done rapidly. Otherwise, people became dependent on humanitarian assistance. FAO had deployed 70 experts to assist Governments and financial institutions and was involved in the tasks of boat repair, procurement of engine parts and fishing gear, access to seeds and farming tools, irrigation repair and treatment of saltwater damage. Its guiding principles were to: create more diverse and sustainable livelihoods; maximize local procurement; balance increased productivity with protection of fragile ecosystems, on which livelihoods depended; and advocate a community-based approach based on people's capacities and priorities. Reconstruction efforts were being slowed by the restitution of property titles, rehabilitation of 50,000 hectares of salt-affected cropland and damage to irrigation. The fishing industry was vital to the tsunami-affected areas, and technology employed had to match local needs. There was concern that boat repairs by NGOs lacking technical expertise

might create hazards and that an excess of new boat deliveries would exhaust fragile fishing resources. Alternatives to fishing had to be found, and forests had to be protected during reconstruction. As vast resources were available, what was most needed was technical guidance and better coordination by NGOs.

16. **Mr. Heru** (Agency for Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of Aceh and Nias, Indonesia) said that in the course of village planning and efforts at disaster risk reduction in Aceh, it had emerged that each village had to have a hall of women — in reality more like a community house than a hall — because women were the community leaders. There were proposals to rebuild further back from the coast so as to permit construction of a wider road and of a solid building where people could take refuge in the event of disaster. It looked as though the project would not be too expensive and that funding would come from the community itself.

17. **Mr. Pasha** (Assistant Secretary-General, UNDP) said that UNDP was focussing on projects to address vulnerabilities and initiate disaster risk reduction projects. At the community level in Sri Lanka, it was moving ahead very actively on local capacity-building with disaster preparedness efforts and mitigation measures.

18. **Mr. Shaar** (Special Representative for the Tsunami Operation, International Federation of Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies) said that there could be no effective early warning system without awareness at the regional and community levels. The local chapters of the Federation were directing their efforts at that aspect of the situation and were also involved in reconstruction and agricultural programmes, including experiments in restoring mangrove growth in shore zones.

19. **Mr. China** (Coordinator of the Tsunami Response, FAO) said that the system for allocating resources was less than optimal and it was difficult to tell when one particular area of need had been oversubscribed. Greater discretion should be given to the humanitarian coordinator in order to provide an overview of changing needs and of areas into which resources should be channelled in order to ensure early recovery.

Fourth panel discussion on lessons learned from the recent Indian Ocean earthquake/tsunami disaster: investing in risk reduction, mitigation and preparedness

20. **Ms. Cravero** (Director, Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, UNDP, Moderator) invited the representative of Mozambique to address the Council on the importance of natural disaster preparedness initiatives and his Government's efforts to reduce the country's vulnerability to floods.

21. **Mr. Chidumo** (Mozambique) said that the report of the Secretary-General (A/60/86-E/2005/77) offered an in-depth assessment of how the crisis had unfolded and contained important recommendations on improving preparedness for future emergencies.

22. Turning to his own Government's efforts to reduce vulnerability to the disastrous effects of floods, he said that Mozambique was particularly vulnerable to floods, not only because the majority of international river basins in southern Africa drained into the Mozambique Channel, but also because many tropical cyclones originated in the Indian Ocean. The situation was further aggravated by the lack of adequate infrastructures such as dams, essential to the regulation of watercourses in mitigating cyclical droughts and floods.

23. His Government had long focused on preparedness to natural disasters, and had set up mechanisms such as the Disaster Management Coordinating Council, comprising relevant Government ministries and chaired by the Prime Minister to ensure multisectoral coordination at the highest political level. The Council worked in the framework of a national disaster policy, and was structured at provincial and local levels. A draft disaster bill was currently before the Assembly of the Republic.

24. Special emphasis was placed on contingency planning, which was based on the early warning system and included training and simulation field exercises. In 1999, for instance, the field exercise had been based on local-level risk mapping and assessment in an effort to promote awareness among communities potentially at risk. That training had proved very useful in saving human lives and protecting economic and social assets just a few months later.

25. Nonetheless, the exceptional magnitude of the 2000 floods, had underscored the need for further measures. They had included land zoning and resettlement of displaced persons in higher, less vulnerable locations; building of new houses and infrastructures; nationwide awareness-raising campaigns and training on disasters; implementation of a disaster risk reduction project in the Buzi river basin in central Mozambique; preparation of a cyclone flag warning system; preparation of annual contingency plans; drafting of a natural disaster strategic plan; and strengthened subregional coordination with other members of the Southern African Development Community to improve the regional early warning mechanism.

26. However, Mozambique needed to do even more to improve its preparedness for natural disasters. At a recent special meeting of the Cabinet the President had directed the Government to take a proactive approach in addressing situations likely to result in suffering in areas prone to cyclical droughts. The Government would look into ways of ensuring water preservation in such areas.

27. Finally, he said that his Government appreciated the generous support it had received from the international community. One of the lessons it had learned concerned the necessity of ensuring that funds pledged for reconstruction programmes were promptly disbursed. Delays often resulted in additional suffering.

28. **Mr. Briceño** (Director, International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR)), noting that disasters posed a threat to achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, said that the recently adopted Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015, set the course for Governments and regional and international organizations to engage in developing a more effective process in the coming years. However, obstacles still remained. Humanitarian and development actors needed to work together more closely and to agree on how tasks should be shared. It was not possible to assume that someone would take care of reducing risk and vulnerability. Humanitarians and development actors must engage together to ensure that those vulnerabilities were addressed beginning during the recovery period.

29. The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction had been conceived for that purpose, but in order for its work to be effective, ISDR would have to be recognized as an essential tool of the international community to facilitate implementation of the Hyogo Framework; it would need the support of all Governments at the General Assembly to include it in the regular United Nations budget. While most of its resources would continue to come from voluntary contributions it was imperative that some of its funds should come from the regular budget.

30. The ISDR secretariat had been engaged with Governments and regional partners, including the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO, WHO, UNDP and others, in building the capacities required to address not only tsunamis but other natural hazards that affected the Indian Ocean countries. Work was also needed in other regions of the world. Finally, he reiterated what previous speakers had stated, namely, that the resources so generously provided for relief and recovery efforts should also be utilized to reduce risks and vulnerabilities in order to avert new future disasters.

31. **Mr. Osman** (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)) said that the number of disaster events was rising rapidly, as was the number of people affected by them. Indeed, disasters threatened to undo development gains and prevent the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. The mission of IFRC was "to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity". The IFRC strategy was, therefore, to reduce disaster risk by responding to local vulnerability through four core areas of work: promotion of humanitarian principles and values, disaster response, disaster preparedness and health and care in the community.

32. Priorities included ensuring that early warning systems were multihazard and people-centred; technological solutions were not sufficient. Overemphasis on a single hazard, such as tsunamis, diverted attention from the multitude of other hazards regularly facing vulnerable populations. His organization would work to raise awareness of potential hazards, disseminate warnings and evacuation plans, and prepare communities to respond to disasters.

33. Disaster risk reduction was the responsibility not only of those working in the area of disasters but also of those engaged in development. Poor planning or construction and man-made changes to the physical environment could contribute to a population's

vulnerability. IFRC recognized the link between recovery and development and worked to ensure that recovery programmes did not reconstruct risk.

34. Lastly, IFRC believed that a key component of reducing disaster risk was the building of national institutional capacity. It was helping to build that capacity by developing its member national societies so that they could assist Governments in disaster response and disaster preparedness.

35. **Mr. Mohamad Razif** (Malaysia) asked Mr. Briceño what would be the consequences if another disaster of the same magnitude as the recent tsunami were to strike in the near future, and whether he could elaborate on the status of the implementation of early warning systems in disaster-prone areas, especially the Indian Ocean.

36. **Ms. Betson** (Ireland) asked the representative of Mozambique whether his Government was having to take money away from other areas such as poverty reduction, in order to fund disaster relief efforts.

37. **Mr. Briceño** (Director, International Strategy for Disaster Reduction) said that due to the magnitude of the disaster, people in the affected areas were much more aware and knowledgeable than they had been in the past. Education, the key to disaster reduction, was being greatly advanced by the media and local institutions. However, technical capacities also needed to be developed. As for the implementation of early warning systems, emphasis was currently being placed on systems to detect tsunamis. Detection capacities in use in the Pacific Ocean had now been made available to countries in the Indian Ocean; that would make detection much easier if another tsunami were to occur. The installation of sensors in the Indian Ocean was expected to be finalized by May or June 2006, but in the meantime, temporary arrangements had been made.

38. An intergovernmental coordinating group was being set up, and would hold its first meeting in August 2005 in Perth, Australia. The identification of needs requiring attention included the major challenge of addressing multiple hazards, rather than just the danger of tsunamis. That was where other institutions came into play, including the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and those organizations working in other areas of institution-building.

39. **Mr. Chidumo** (Mozambique), replying to the question of the representative of Ireland, said that if there were no need for disaster preparedness measures, his Government would have more funds to invest in other priority areas such as its development agenda. The President had recently convened a special Cabinet meeting to examine ways of making the best possible use of the limited funds available.

40. **Ms. Golberg** (Canada) asked Mr. Briceño to provide additional information on the indicators he had mentioned in his presentation, and asked the Moderator to describe any challenges she was encountering in mainstreaming disaster risk reduction in United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs), and to describe the discussions taking place on that issue.

41. **Mr. Briceño** (Director, International Strategy for Disaster Reduction) said that the development of indicators was part of the process of implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015. Some indications as to how that process would evolve were contained in a document on strategic directions for implementation of the Hyogo Framework, which had been approved at the latest session of the Inter-Agency Task Force for Disaster Reduction, would soon be published on the website.

42. **Ms. Cravero** (Director, Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, UNDP, Moderator), said that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), together with the United Nations Development Group (UNDG), were working to make sure that preparedness response, risk reduction and recovery aspects were central to UNDAFs and national development plans. A central challenge was the fact that disaster response was easier to integrate; it was more difficult to ensure that appropriate emphasis was placed upon preparedness and risk reduction. Recovery was a long-term process.

43. **Mr. Boonpracong** (Thailand) said that his Government supported the efforts of the United Nations to strengthen its global emergency response network, and the proposal concerning the establishment of an emergency response facility in South-East Asia. It had recently launched a disaster warning centre, which would deal not only with tsunamis but also with other types of disaster. It was hoped that the centre would be able to issue warnings within 20 minutes, by means of ham radio, mobile telephones, the mass media, and warning towers in disaster-prone areas.

44. **Mr. Chidumo** (Mozambique), replying to a question from the Moderator, said that his Government's annual requests for financial assistance related to a multitude of important issues including disaster and emergency preparedness; naturally, some support was received. The amounts pledged could be quite encouraging, as had been the case following the severe flooding which had affected the country in consecutive years; however, difficulties arose when it came to disbursement of the funds when they were needed. His Government welcomed the recent decision on debt cancellation taken at the G-8 summit meeting. There were still a number of pressing issues, and they could not be dealt with individually; a global strategy was needed.

45. **Mr. Osman** (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies), in reply to a question from Ms. Wahlstrom, said that the IFRC five-year investment plan included the building of a human-resource base, with a considerable increase in the number of competent volunteers on the ground; improvements in organizational capacity; and efforts in the area of community-based health programmes, especially community-based first aid. One important skill IFRC was seeking to introduce at the local level was vulnerability assessment capacity.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.